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ABSTRACT

A study examined the beliefs and attitudes of students, coaches, and judges on the use of manuscripts at the college level in oral interpretation events (prose, drama, program oral interpretation, dramatic duo, and poetry). Survey data were collected from students, coach-judges, and hired judges participating in a Midwestern forensics tournament during the fall 1994-95 season. Results indicated a wide range of beliefs and perspectives concerning the subject--from mandatory use of the manuscript to maintain author integrity to how a manuscript limits and/or detracts from a performance. Results also indicated that the strongest perspective was to maintain the manuscript, and that author intent emerged as the dominant theoretical perspective for the use of a manuscript. Findings suggest that manuscripts will continue to be used in competitive forensics because: (1) judges-coaches and students will continue to incorporate the author intent/objectivist theoretical perspective as a justification for using manuscripts; (2) participants are hesitant to alter long standing traditions in forensics; and (3) participants are concerned how the absence of a manuscript may impact judging decisions. (Contains six notes.) (RS)

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# Survey Opinions On Using A Manuscript In Oral Interpretation Events

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# SURVEY OPINIONS ON USING A MANUSCRIPT IN ORAL INTERPRETATION EVENTS

## Introduction

The use of a manuscript in oral interpretation events has a strong tradition at the college level. As a rule, the use of a manuscript has been required in oral interpretation events since the inception of both The American Forensics Association (AFA) in 1976 and The National Forensics Association (NFA) in 1967. Consequently, students, coaches and judges have never experienced college forensics with manuscripts optional in oral interpretation events.

In contrast, the use of a manuscript in high school forensics varies per state. As a rule, for example, manuscripts are not allowed at The National Forensics League national tournament, and manuscripts are optional in oral interpretation events at Minnesota High School League sponsored tournaments. As a result, high school forensics students bring varied experiences with manuscript use in oral interpretation events to the college forensics level.

Our study describes the beliefs and attitudes of students, coaches and judges on the use of manuscripts at the college level in oral interpretation events (i.e., prose, drama, program oral interpretation, dramatic duo, and poetry). Specifically, the present study is designed to examine student, coach and judge opinions about (a) how the presence of a manuscript affects performance and competitive ranks; (b) what oral interpretation events should have manuscripts required; and (c) what oral interpretation events should have manuscripts optional.

In this study, the term "manuscript" is used to remain consistent with the language used in AFA and NFA oral interpretation event descriptions. Commonly, students, coaches and judges refer to the manuscript as "the book," "the script," or "the script book." As a result, the term "manuscript" refers to any book, script or

papers the student holds during performance of prose, drama, program oral interpretation, dramatic duo, and poetry.

## Method

We provide a brief discussion of qualitative methods, particularly those discussed by Patton (1990). Qualitative methods are primarily distinguished by a focus on inductive strategies of exploration, as opposed to the traditional deductive approach which relies on a priori assumptions (Patton, p. 66). According to Patton, qualitative methods rely on the grounded approach (i.e., grounding the findings in the empirical world) and have been identified in a variety of perspectives including ethnography, phenomenology, heuristics, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, ecological psychology, systems theory, chaos theory (nonlinear dynamics), hermeneutics, complexity, and orientational qualitative inquiry.[1]

A phenomenon being studied can be an emotion, task, experience, relationship, organization, or culture. We examine survey data for themes, categories, and patterns in closed-ended and open-ended responses.
The researcher attempts to understand experiences by describing, explicating, and providing an interpretation of the survey data. Description and interpretation, however, become intertwined to the point that they are inseparable. Interpretation is, therefore, necessary to understand the experience while interpretation is also part of the description of experience studied. Researchers focus on the interrelationship between interpretation and experience to construct a "worldview: There is no separate (or objective) reality for people" (Patton, 1990, p. 69). According to Cox (1990), interpreting is not a process for discovering meaning, but rather a source of invention.[2] Interpretation is a process broader than discovery and involves seeing things in a new way than previously perceived. Interpretation is not a discovery of what was there, but a generation of insight and perception. Interpretation is,

therefore, tied with critique, if it is not the same thing. Critique is interpretation, and interpretation is critique (Cox, 1990).

The process of pattern identification is addressed by Guba (1978), Polkinghorne (1983), and Patton (1990). According to Patton (1990), the purpose of an inductive approach is to allow dimensions to emerge from the data, rather than the imposed application of a priori hypotheses and variables (P. 85). The patterns are identified using a process Polkinghorne (1983) compares to the Miller Analogies Test: "'line is to 'draw' as 'music' is to 'face,' 'song,' 'ears,' or 'act'" (Gruber & Gruber, 1972, p. 271).

The first step in an inductive, qualitative study, according to Patton (1990), is the process of identifying and categorizing the primary patterns in the data. The data are read and placed within at least one possible topic area. A passage, due to its plurivocality may belong in more than one topic area. Guba (1978) labels this part of the process "convergence." Convergence is simply figuring out what goes with what. The researcher begins to identify patterns by reviewing a variety of examples. The patterns which emerge from the data can be represented in two ways. First, the patterns can be identified by indigenous concepts--the actual labels or terms used in the discourse by the persons being studied. Indigenous concepts are formed from the "special vocabulary" of persons because "the phenomena to which the labels refer are important to the people in the setting and that to fully understand the setting it is necessary to understand those terms and their implications" (Patton, p. 395). Indigenous concepts rely on the basic premise that important things will be given a name, thus separating them from other important things with their own names (Patton, p. 393). Second, patterns can be identified by sensitizing concepts. Analyst-constructed concepts are the terms constructed by the researcher to explain emergent categories in the discourse, categories for which the persons studied do not have a label or term.

Patterns are tested by re-examining the data examples to determine if the pattern is applicable. Guba (1978) provides two criteria to judge categories: internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Internal homogeneity is the degree to which data in a category or pattern fit together. External heterogeneity is the degree to which categories or patterns are clear and distinct.

After identifying various patterns, the researcher begins a search for overall typologies which unite the patterns together (Patton, 1990, p. 393). Typologies come in two forms of indigenous and analyst constructed, which are similar in nature to the indigenous and analyst-constructed concepts detailed above.

The pattern identification and typology processes continue "until an account can be given which clarifies the data in the fullest manner" (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 272). Full clarification is what Geertz (1973) would call "thick description." Basically, a researcher continues the process of identification and typology until the patterns become redundant and no new categories are evoked (Endres, 1989).

According to Patton (1990), an effective way to present patterns and typologies is through metaphors. Metaphors are an effective method of presenting findings because they can convey a great deal of information in a short statement or phrase (Patton, p. 402). Patton warns against "reifying metaphors and acting as if the world were really the way the metaphor suggests it is." However, indigenous labels, terms, and typologies can provide significant insight because for the persons being studied the metaphor is not a just a metaphor for understanding; it is his/her rhetorical reality.[3]

The identification of the pattern which gives meaning(s) to the text is gained through the researcher's insight, an insight which is not derived from the application of precise mathematical procedures, but through the support of plurivocal evidence (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 238). The evidence is plurivocal because discourse is open to multiple interpretations. The possibility of multiple

interpretations indicates the process of pattern identification does not provide for prediction. Rather than prediction, the purpose in qualitative analysis is the *interpretation* of the human realm, a realm available to us through "direct communication that people have with each other" and "through written and artistic communication" (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 239). We compose themes, categories, and patterns in the interview data using the qualitative process. The process is not "carved in stone," but rather serves to provide direction for ourselves and our readers.

## Data

The human realm is available to us through spoken communication and written communication (Polkinghorne, 1983). Patton (1990) identifies and describes the following forms of qualitative data. First, qualitative data can be derived through written documents. Document data "yields excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries; and open-ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys" (Patton, p. 10). Patton considers program documents to be an extremely rich source of information because they are useful for learning and for generating research questions (Patton, p. 10).

Specifically, the survey data used in our study were collected from students, coach-judges, and hired judges participating in a Midwestern tournament during the fall of the 1994-1995 season. Surveys were distributed and collected during the course of the tournament.

Competitors, coaches-judges, and hired judges were asked to consider the advantages and disadvantages of using a manuscript in oral interpretation events.

## Results

We placed the survey data into two primary groups for purposes of understanding the perspectives of involvement. The two primary groups are "Students" and "Judges."[4] Qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses illuminate the following primary themes: "Students for Manuscripts," "Students Against Manuscripts," "Students for Optional Manuscripts," "Judges for Manuscripts," "Judges Against Manuscripts," "Judges for Optional Manuscripts. "We shall explain and provide evidence demonstrating the efficacy of the themes.

### Students For Manuscript

Some students expressed very adamant reasons the manuscript should be remain a part of competitive oral interpretation events. The categories emerging from the data include technique, author's intent, interpretation versus acting, and focus on literature. We describe the categories below and provide specific comments from the surveys.

#### Technique

Students want to keep the manuscript around in oral interpretation events because it may be used for a variety of technical reasons (e.g., differentiating characters, scene changes, transitions). Specific comments from students include "it [manuscript] helps in scene changes, especially in Dramatic Interp and duo. The book can be used to enhance oral interp. performances with certain technique moves"; "in interp., POI, demands a script book to differentiate"; and "manuscripts help with transitions in oral interp." Some comments were more specific identifying the manuscript as a prop: "they're really the interper's only prop"; "in oral interpretation, scripts should be used to add to the performance. It allows a speaker to have a 'prop'"; and "a manuscript can be used almost as a prop in oral interp."

Author's Intent

On a more theoretical level, the intent of the author in writing the poetry/play/prose is a primary concern expressed by many respondents. Students' comments clearly indicate a strong belief the manuscript is an embodiment of the author's intent: "Interp: The way it enhances it is by making it legitimate and not giving all the praise to the competitor, but to the author as well"; "you must use a script and refer to it during you presentation of oral interp. events for the purpose of the author"; "A script in oral interpretation keeps a speaker true to the author's wishes and intent for the manuscript"; and "you must give credit to the author!!"

Interpretation versus Acting

Another theoretical position is evident in the third category to emerge from the interview data–the issue of interpretation versus acting . Students comments illuminate a concern between interpretation and acting. The comments clearly indicate "acting" belongs in the theater and "interpretation" belongs to forensics: "It is ludicrous to suggest that the oral interp events not use scripts. This is oral interp. not acting"; "in interp. events: The thing we need to remember is that interp is not acting. It's taking a piece of literature and bring the listener to life through the literature. It should be Mandatory to have scripts in ALL interp events" (original emphasis); "Interpretation events need the manuscript because it is interp. not acting. In oral interp. a manuscript and limited movement distinguishes an interp. event from acting"; "oral interpretation isn't acting, therefore if a script is used, it still maintains 'interpreting'"; "Without a script, it goes beyond the limits of interp. Just as a tear falling, or duo partners touching, it is going past the limits of interp."; and "it also defines our activity as interp not acting as seen on stage. This is one of the fundamental differences between acting and speech."

Focus on Literature

A focus on the literature is the final category students asserted for maintaining the use a manuscript in oral interpretation. The category illuminates a concern the literature be recognized as distinct from a student's own ideas. Comments include: "I believe that having a script helps keep the audience aware that it is interpretation and not the competitor's own ideas"; "making sure it is literature not an original speech" and "oral interp isn't ones own ideas, therefore a script should be visible to make that point."

Students Against Books

The second theme to emerge from the interview data are students against the use of books in oral interpretation events. Emergent categories include the irrelevancy of the script, how the book detracts from the performance, and performers are too dependent on the script.

Script Irrelevant

Students' comments illustrate a general pragmatic feeling the manuscript is not really necessary in oral interpretation. The manuscript hampers and/or impedes the flow of the performance between performer and the audience. Specific comments emerge from the data: "It's just annoying to watch an interp person look down at their script when it's obvious the piece is memorized!"; "people rarely use their script to remember the story. They just seem to hold it"; and "it seems pointless to have manuscripts required in oral interp. when its not used."

Detracting from Performance

The second categorical reason students are against the use of manuscripts is a belief it detracts from the overall performance. Students indicate a performance may be stronger and more worthwhile if the manuscript were not used. Specific comments include: "Detracts a lot from interpretation"; "any others [than duo] in my opinion detracts--the story could be told more accurately without book"; and "I

think that a script limits a person's options in respect to the movement during the performance. We hardly need one other thing to worry about, like making sure a script doesn't drop."

Dependence on Script

The final categorical area indicates a displeasure with the manuscript: "People have become to physical dependent on the "book" using it as, dare I say it, a prop."

Students Optional Books

The final primary theme to emerge from the data provided by students are those who believe manuscripts should be optional. One dominant reason is voiced for an optional use of manuscripts–an option provides for a fuller range of performance choices. Comments illuminating the desire for optionality include: "By choice, make it just another performance choice"; "it [may] add–but for some people the book is crippling and they could be using their hand and arms more–but they are handicapped with the book"; "I think it should be choice and ability of competitor--gives more to work towards"; and "we are here to perform the best way we can. WE need to be able to have all of our options open, whether it be using or not using a script."

Judges for Manuscripts

Like the students, some judges expressed adamant reasons the manuscript should remain a part ofcompttive oral interpretation events. The categories emerging from the data include: technique, interpretation versus acting, credibility to author, focus on literature, and affects on rank. We describe the categories below and provide specific comments from the surveys.

Technique

Like the students, judges want to keep the manuscript in competitive oral interpretive events because it may be used for a variety of technical purposes (e.g., transitions, blocking). Specific comments from judges include: "Without a script or

anything else, transitions feel and look awkward"; "The script can work as a great tool for blocking within oral interp."; "The script functions as a device to clearly delineate when the performer is in character"; "Oral interp: 'Cuz I like the neat way people open/close/use/pass them in duo interp." and "The script becomes a tool to be used, not a problem."

Interpretation versus Acting

Judges seemed primarily concerned with the theoretical function of the manuscript in competitive oral interpretive events. Consistent with students, judges clearly state the manuscript's role in the distinction between acting and interpretation. Judges comments include: "To maintain the interp vs. acting sentiment if feel script is necessary."; "Use of the manuscripts in OI seems to enhance the interpretative nature of the event."; "If you don't have a manuscript in OI it is acting! This is not acting!!" and "Scripts help to distinguish oral interp from acting. I think that without scripts, students will cross into acting."

Credibility to Author

The third category to emerge from the judge's survey data is the function the manuscript plays in giving credibility to the author of the prose/poetry/play. Judges indicate that the script acknowledges the author during the performance: "It [manuscript] enhances an oral interp. event in that it gives credibility to the authors."; "In interp., the manuscript provides credibility and acknowledgment of author."

Focus on Literature

Judges for the use of manuscripts asserted that the manuscript places a focus on the literature. Judges in this category express a desire for the literature to be emphasized during the performance: "I think the script can serve as a wonderful tool--it helps center a performer on the literature."; "interping a story or poetry is given more authority with manuscript."

Affects on Rank

Finally, judges for the use of manuscripts described how the use of the manuscript affects their ranking decisions. Judges surveyed clearly allow the absence or poor use of the manuscript to negatively affect the student's competitive success. Specific comments: "In past I have marked down ranks/rates in oral interp if they didn't use a manuscript properly."; "The absence of manuscript in OI affects rate/rank negatively." and "As a judge, even if scripts become optional, I will never give a competitor without a manuscript a 1-25 the same holds true for competitors in PA with manuscripts."

Judges Against Manuscript

Another theme emergent from the survey data is judges against the use of manuscripts in oral interpretation events. Two categories emerged: limits performance, and manuscript as a prop.

Limits Performance

Judges against the use of manuscripts believe manuscripts limit the possibilities of a performance. Specific comments: "I think it [manuscript] constricts the performer-ties them down-makes the performance too subtle, too controlled. Not realistic, yet that is our top criterion. How ironic?" and "More can be done--interpretation can take a broader approach–people will not be limited by a script book."

Manuscript as Prop

One judge against manuscripts in oral interpretation events indicated what he or she believes is the function of the manuscript: "For many years, a script has been nothing but a prop in oral interp. Face it."

Coach-Judge Optional Books

Coaches and judges also voiced an opinion that manuscripts should be an optional possibility in oral interpretation events, rather than mandated or abolished.

Comments from coach and judges generate the categories of creativity/effectiveness and how the script may be detracting from the performance.

Creativity/Effectiveness

The category of creativity/effectiveness illuminates the perspective the manuscript is only of a host of interpretive possibilities a performer should consider. The comments indicate options should be considered and/or rejected as appropriate to the student, the material, and the overall performance. Specific comments illustrating the efficacy of the category include: "It depends on the performer in interp, a script can definitely be used in a manner that's creative"; "I would have it optional for Duo. and DI because they are more along the lines of theater book can be used effectively but some times it hinders"; "it depends on the performance and how it is used or not used"; and "individual should choose what is desirable for his/her work. No reason manuscripts inherently superior, etc."

Detracting

The manuscript is believed by some to be more a deterrence than an effective requirement for oral interpretation. Coach-judges indicated, "if the student is an effective speaker, the script is not even noticed - It becomes a distraction, when the listener is not caught up in the speech. Sometimes the use of the script becomes too 'theatrical.'"

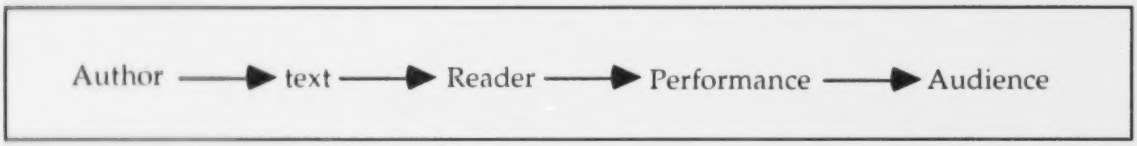
One final comment indicates the an overall impression of coach-judges in regard to making the manuscript optional: "I believe I may be scared not to see it in interp. Its all we have ever known. But hey- I love change, so I'm sure I'd adapt. I just think the older more traditional judges will freak, changing status quo."

## Implications

The analysis provides a greater understanding into the issue of manuscript use in oral interpretation events. First, a wide range of beliefs and perspectives exist concerning the subject–from mandatory use of the manuscript to mantain author

integrity to how a manuscript limits and/or detracts from a performance. Perspectives are, in some instances, contradictory. The use of a manuscript as a prop, for example, is indicated as a reason to keep it *and* a reason it should be abolished.

The analysis clearly indicates the strongest perspective is to maintain the manuscript--for a variety of reasons. We believe a requirement mandate based on the author intent illuminates a particular aspect of forensics–the belief in author intent (i.e., objectivism). Author intent is only one potential interpretive/performative perspective. An objectivist/author's intent perspective assumes the writer embedded an invariable meaning in the text.[5] The meaning is, therefore, contained in and may be extracted from the text. The objectivist/author intent perspective is a linear phenomenon:




Meaning is imbedded in the text by the author; meaning is extracted from the text by the reader (student); meaning is transmitted by the reader into the performance; meaning is transmitted by the performance to the audience.[6] The student is a passive transmitter of the author's intent to a passive audience. The objectivist stance requires author's intent as a singular referent and, therefore, only one interpretation-performance can be correct. A judge is required to determine if a student's performance is "correct and true" to the author's intent.

We believe the above diagram looks highly familiar. Compare the above diagram to the traditional linear model of communication:

The linear model of communication, however, was abandoned by the communication discipline a significant time ago.

We argue a requirement to use a manuscript compels participants (i.e., students and coach-judges) into the objectivist philosphy. Other perspectives, such as a postmodernist pefspective, are potentially alienated by a mandatory manuscript requirement.

Author intent emerged from the data as dominant theoretical perspective for the use a manuscript, yet we wonder if students and coach-judges are fully aware of the ontological and epistemological assumptions supporting the position. We question an implied mandatory theoretical perspective being imposed on performers in intercollegiate competitive forensics. The conviction that forensics is a co-curricular activity is potentially damaged by such an implied status and, therefore, the full range of educational possibilities are limited for participants.

Nevertheless, we hypothesize manuscripts will continue to be used in competitive forensics for third principle reasons. First, we believe judges-coaches and students will continue to incorporate the author intent/objectivist theoretical perspective in forensics as a justification for using manuscripts. Second, participants are hesitant to alter long standing traditions in forensics. One respondent noted, "I believe I may be scared not to see it in interp. Its all we have ever known. But hey- I love change, so I'm sure I'd adapt. I just think the older more traditional judges will freak, changing status quo." Finally, participants are concerned how the absence of a manuscript may impact judging decisions. For example, the use or non-use of a manuscript may influence judges to believe a person is more/less prepared than other participants.

Endnotes

[1] The primary proponents of grounded theory are Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Strauss and Corbin (1990).

[2] An attempt to discover meaning is part of traditional hermeneutics.

[3] See Osborn (1967) for an historical account of the evolution of metaphor from the shifting of words in language to its contemporary position as a fundamental thought process.

[4] We use the term "judges" as inclusive of coaches, coach-judges and hired judges.

[5] I refer the interested reader to *The Act of Writing* by Daniel Chandler and to *Critical Practice* by Catherine Belsey. Chandler (1995) refers to the objectivist process as "transmissive,: meaning is seen as something which can be transmitted from a sender to a passive receiver" (p. 1).

[6] Chandler (1995) refers to the objectivist process as "transmissive,: meaning is seen as something which can be transmitted from a sender to a passive receiver" (p. 1).

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